

June 25, 2014

Question: *"I applied to my dream school in the U.S. and I got in! Now I need to get my visa – how do I do this?"*

Congratulations! American universities and colleges are among the world's best and you should feel very proud of your accomplishment.

First, you'll need to determine the type of visa required for your study. Your course of study and the type of school you plan to attend determine whether you will need an F-1 visa or an M-1 visa. Generally, if you will attend a university or college, high school, private elementary school, seminary, conservatory or other academic institution such as a language training program, you will need an F visa. If you will attend a vocational or other recognized nonacademic institution, you will need an M visa. The Embassy and consular officer can also help you confirm this when you come in for your interview if you're unsure of your visa type.

Next, complete the online application. You'll be pleased to know the application for a student visa involves exactly the same procedures followed for a visitor's visa. All applicants must fill out the DS-160 visa application, pay the application fee, schedule an appointment to interview for the visa, and bring the standard visa application documentation to the Embassy (a passport valid for the next 6 months, any previous passports/visas, DS-160 confirmation sheet, appointment confirmation page, a passport photo and proof of visa application fee).

Then, prepare some documentation for your visa interview. While the online application form is the same as the application for a visitor's visa, you'll also need several other items at your interview that are associated uniquely with the student visa. These include:

1. The I-20 form, which your school will send to you once they have processed your admission. Make sure the entry date specified on the I-20 is a date that has not yet passed. If the entry date listed on the I-20 has already passed, or will pass before the visa issuance process is complete, you should obtain a new I-20 from your school or request a letter from the school indicating that you have permission to arrive at school after the date indicated on the I-20.
2. Proof of sufficient funds for at least the first year of your studies in the U.S. and your plan to cover the remainder of your studies. Applicants should be prepared to present documentation relating to scholarships, grants, and loans, if applicable, as well as affidavits of support and bank statements from sponsors.
3. Payment confirmation of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee. Your school will enroll you in the SEVIS and the fee (\$200 USD for F and M visas) can be paid through Western Union or online. The Embassy is not authorized to collect this fee.
4. Recent transcripts, standardized test scores, and other evidence to prove that you are a bona fide student whose main purpose of travel is to complete a course of study in the U.S. Applicants must also demonstrate that they possess sufficient knowledge of English to pursue their intended course of study.

Keep in mind that we expect students to return to Jamaica after they have completed their program of study. For this reason, the consular officer may ask you to discuss your future plans during the interview.

Try to anticipate when you'll have all of the necessary documents and schedule your interview date for the earliest time once you can bring everything to the interview. Even if you do not intend to begin your program for several months, it's best to apply as early as possible. Your visa can be issued up to 120 days before your arrival; however, you will not be allowed to enter the U.S. more than 30 days before the start of your program.

Your spouse and unmarried minor children may also reside with you in the U.S. while you study. If they choose to do this, they must obtain their own individual I-20 forms but don't need to pay the SEVIS fee. Feel free to schedule their interviews at the same time as your own and bring proof of relationship (for example, birth certificates or marriage certificates).

Once you have your visa, you're ready to go to school! During your studies, be sure to consult the Designated School Official (DSO) at your university prior to traveling outside of the U.S. – the DSO generally works in the International Student Office and will be able to guide you on how to keep your student visa up to date. Enjoy your studies and time in the U.S.!

If you're interested in attending school in the U.S. but haven't yet looked into programs, the Embassy's Paul Robeson Information Resource Center is open to the public daily to help students research educational opportunities, prepare for standardized exams and help select universities. Adviser Eva Barnes provides individual and group advising to members of the public – email kingston@educationusa.info or call 876-276-5826 to make an appointment.

You can find more information about how to travel to the U.S. on our website, www.kingston.usembassy.gov. Keep on top of Embassy news on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Embassy-Jamaica> and by following @USEmbassyJA on Twitter. We also answer general visa questions on our Facebook and Twitter pages.